



John 13:18-30  
So That You May Believe: John  
“Real Peace”

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4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

With today being the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent and the Sunday we celebrate the peace that Jesus offers, I want to spend some time in today’s message really focused on this topic of peace. So, it’s a little bit of a different kind of sermon today that is a little less walking through the passage, and more focusing on a particular topic that comes out of the passage. We’ll read it in just a moment. But before we do, I want you to think about “peace” and what that is to you. **When you think of peace, what is it that comes to mind – what state of being does it entail, what images come to mind, what does it look like in your life, or in this world, to have peace?**

My guess is, a lot of people tend to think of “peace” as sitting on the beach at sunset, calm winds, quiet households...as the absence of conflict and uncertainty in life. No elevated heart rate, no nights spent wondering what tomorrow will bring, etc. In fact, take a moment and share with your neighbor about comes to mind when you think of “peace.”

So, we’ve got this idea of what peace is. Additionally, most people would like more peace in their lives. Maybe there are a few people who flourish in the midst of chaos, or conflict, or uncertainty. But I bet most of us, when facing a jobless stretch of life, or a health scare like cancer, or the possibility of divorce...I bet in situations like that, most of us, even the most die-hard chaos and conflict lover, would like to find some peace. With that in mind, let’s turn to today’s passage, **John 13:18-30**.

Ok, so let’s cut to the chase. **Verse 21 tells us that Jesus was “troubled in spirit.”** The Greek word – tarasso – is used in a few other places in John, including at the pool of Bethesda, which is the pool where the Jerusalem locals believed that when the waters were “stirred up” – “tarassoed” we might say – that the first person in at that moment would be healed of whatever their physical ailment was. So, the “stirred up waters” is the same root word as what Jesus is feeling here. His insides are stirred up; he’s agitated; he’s troubled, he’s restless (all possible translations of the word). Maybe his heartbeat is elevated a bit. Maybe his palms were a bit sweaty. In

Luke's biography of Jesus, he tells us that a bit later, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' sweat was like drops of blood, which is a real physiological phenomena that can happen when someone is under extreme stress.

And yet, here in John, just a bit later that evening, in John 14:27 Jesus says these words, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).** “Troubled” is this same word once again – tarasso. And that's a very famous and well-known verse that has helped people find peace in distressing times: It's been read at probably half the memorial services I've conducted in 20 years as a pastor. It occurs to me, however, it ought to be read at wedding ceremonies. “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” I mean, what couple standing at the altar doesn't need to hear words like that, right? I'm sure Gwen especially did when we got married 25 years ago – I was a ski bum when she met me and still was when we got engaged, and so she mostly was counting on potential that she saw in me. Talk about troubling and fear-inducing!

But the point is that: Jesus says these words, offering his peace – and yet in today's passage, a bit earlier in the evening, John tells us that Jesus is stirred up inside, and later his sweat is like drops of blood. So, does Jesus really have peace, or not? Does he really have enough peace to genuinely offer it and share it with others? I mean, it seems like Jesus is the one who needs more peace, right?

**But maybe the problem is that our concept of real peace is all out of whack.** Maybe real peace isn't sunsets on the shores of Maui. Maybe real peace isn't a stress-free life. Maybe real peace isn't the absence of conflict, or of grief and sadness. Perhaps: Real peace is something that supersedes all of those things, or is foundational underneath them, or is a mental understanding of God's sovereignty over life, even as we go through the rollercoaster of emotions. Pick the metaphor or phrasing that resonates with you.

**For me, thinking about the peace Jesus offers as a mental or intellectual knowledge is actually most helpful.** Now, this completely goes against what

you usually hear preached most Sundays. Usually what you hear emphasized is that our faith needs to get out of our head and into our hearts, so it can go from there into the rest of our lives and live it out. The Christian faith can withstand all the intellectual rigor you can throw at it. And some people love that – I do. I love heady, theological discussion, or considering our faith in light of scientific discoveries and so forth. But Jesus commands us to *follow* him, not just *think* like him. And too many Christians keep their faith stuck in their head. So, usually when we talk about this, the message is “get it out of your head and into your heart, and start living your faith.” A way to summarize that might be, “If you *think* you’re living your faith, then you’re thinking too much, and not *actually living* it enough.” That’s the usual message.

But when we lack peace in our lives – when our marriage is troubled, when our health is precarious, when a conflict at work looms on the horizon – when we face those situations, so often our feelings get supercharged, and they can completely overrule our brain. Even our body reacts with sweaty palms and butterflies in the stomach (which happens because of signals in the brain), and then we get sleepless nights...and all of that stuff overrides clear thinking. Our brain gets derailed by the rest of our body, by our feelings.

And so, the place you have to go in order to experience real peace is actually to your intellect. **Specifically: You have to mentally go to the truth of who God is and to the truth that he’s got you in the palms of his hands.**

Reminding yourself of this is critical. So, get your mind...get your thinking...back on track with who God is, what his promises are, and how God has got this. Because the rest of our body – especially our emotions, but also our experiences – can trick us into thinking that God isn’t with us. They can trick us into believing that we can’t find peace until there is no more conflict in our lives. But that’s not true. Biblical peace is something we can have in in the midst of conflict, and it starts with knowing God, and knowing the truth of God, and knowing the promises of God. This comes straight out of Scripture.

For instance, in Philippians 4, there’s a conflict between a couple of gals who were leaders in the church there in Philippi. In his letter, Paul pleads with

them to agree with one another in the Lord. So, there's tension. There's conflict. There's anxiety and maybe fear that comes with this. And Paul writes, **“Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends your understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7)**. Notice the emphasis on “understanding” and “minds” here. The heart is mentioned, but the mental aspect is emphasized more. And in the next verse he emphasizes it again, when he lists off a bunch of positive qualities and characteristics of God and his activity in the world, and he writes, “think about such things.” Again, there's this emphasis on thinking about God, and remembering who he is, particularly when conflict is at hand. This is what brings peace, even in the midst of difficult times. He's not saying this peace will come after they settle the conflict, he's saying the peace will come even in the midst of it.

Romans 12:2 isn't a verse that deals specifically with “peace” but it is a verse that encourages us to stay mentally engaged with, and transformed by, God: **“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2)**. One of the patterns of this world is conflict, stress, anxiety...all that stuff that Paul wrote about in the Philippian church that was going on. And the key to overcoming that (or overcoming whatever patterns of the world we're falling into)...the key to overcoming that is the renewing of our mind. Getting our minds focused on who God is in his truths and promises.

In the Old Testament, many of us are familiar with these words from Psalm 46 that reinforce this again: **“Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10)**. In other words, “calm down, take a deep breath...even though things feel chaotic and uncertain...and rest in the *knowledge* of who I am, the God of the universe.” Again, it's this idea of reassurance through the knowledge of who God is that we see expressed here, because feelings can't be trusted. Physiological responses can't be trusted.

Maybe the best example is from Psalm 23. It doesn't emphasize the “knowing” part...but it makes it clear that peace is found in God, and that can be true even when circumstances are less than ideal. It's not all sunsets

and cappuccinos on the beach. Part of Psalm 23 says, **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows” (Psalm 23:4-5).** This is the picture of someone who is calm and serene...is full of peace, even in some really difficult situations.

And that’s where Jesus finds himself. Jesus is about to walk through the valley of the shadow of death...the table has been prepared before him in this Passover meal...I don’t know that there are enemies in the plural sense gathered around the table, but Judas is there and he’s become an enemy even though he’s one of the disciples.

And, to get us back to the verse where we started: in the midst of this Passover dinner that Jesus celebrates with his disciples: **Jesus’ insides are in turmoil (John 13:21).** He is **“troubled in spirit.”** He’s stirred up on the inside, like the waters at the pool of Bethesda. This feeling carries over to the garden of Gethsemane a bit later, as I mentioned earlier, where his sweat is like drops of blood. And yet, on the outside, Jesus maintains peace and carries on like everything’s normal: Jesus serves them by washing their feet (verses just prior to today’s); He sits with them at the table, eating and engaged in conversation; He explains that their mission and ministry going forward is rooted in *his* mission and ministry, in fact, they’re one and the same...and if someone accepts them and welcomes them, it’s the same as accepting and welcoming Jesus himself; He announces that one of them is a betrayer; And then he breaks bread, dips one piece in the cup, hands it to Judas Iscariot, and now the wheels are set in motion for his betrayal. If John didn’t tell us about Jesus’ insides being stirred up, you wouldn’t know it from how he conducted himself.

And what we see is that: **In spite of his troubled insides: Jesus’ knowledge of his Heavenly Father, his trusting of his Father’s will that comes from that knowledge, leads Jesus to continue on.** And in Luke’s gospel we get Jesus’ prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus is under incredible stress, and he prays to his heavenly father, ultimately ending with, “not my will, but yours, be done”. He knows his heavenly father is good, and he trusts

him. There is peace in the midst of the storm because he trusts God the Father. And Jesus is able to go on here in John and even offer his own peace to the disciples just a bit later. It's *not* a peace that the world gives. Worldly peace is a completely unrealistic absence of conflict, fear, anxiety, and so forth. Peace that the world offers is no peace at all, and really isn't even attainable; not for more than a few minutes or hours at best, at a time. Maybe, if you're really good at letting go of stuff, you can experience worldly peace (no conflicts, etc.) on vacation for a week or two...but as soon as you get on the plane to come home, or start driving home, the mind goes to all that awaits us, and that peace dissipates. It just doesn't last. If an absence of conflict is what we're waiting for before we have peace, we're going to die having never experienced it. The "peaceful, easy feeling" that the Eagles sang of just doesn't last. It's a false bill of goods. There is *always* something to disrupt this false sense of peace that the world offers and dangles before us like a carrot. It's just not possible.

But *real* peace *is* attainable, and is found even in the midst of the conflicts. **Real peace is knowing that there is a God in heaven who is active in this world, who loves us, cares for us, and through Jesus has made a way for us to be with him not only here** (which is good news) **but also after we breathe our last breath** (which is great news). That's a true peace that passes all understanding. That's a peace that can sustain you when your feelings deceive you. That's a peace that can get you through your last supper on the face of the earth with your betrayer at the table. That's a peace that can get you through the chaos of Christmas – and remember, we're not the first ones to experience chaos at Christmas. In fact, the very first Christmas was pretty chaotic, too (the guest room was full, Jesus is laid in a manger, there are farm animals, and guests showing up, etc.). And yet, Jesus sleeps "in heavenly peace" as the song goes. The angels proclaim "peace on earth". This is what Jesus brings, even in the midst of chaos – whether that's Christmas, a wedding, a birth, a funeral, and everything in between.

I pray that this Christmas, and throughout your life, as you face health difficulties, as you raise up kids and grandkids, as you face inflation, job concerns, and whatever else...**I pray that in the midst of it you'd know that God's got you. He has you in the palms of his hands.** Let that

knowledge be the source of your peace. In the face of all that would seek to cause us turmoil on the inside, take a moment or two each day, starting this week...maybe when you're trying to fall asleep at night, and again when you wake up in the morning...take a moment to "be still and know" that the Creator God of the universe has "got this." Jesus is by your side, leading you into eternity, no matter what happens here. And that knowledge can give you real peace, even when, like Jesus, you're all stirred up inside. Let's pray...Amen.